



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL: HB 713
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools
DATE: February 10, 2021
POSITION: Oppose
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

This bill would require each board of education to allow the use of therapy dogs in public schools; it would require each therapy dog be accompanied by a handler; and require each board to adopt a policy for the use and handling of therapy dogs in public schools.

The Public Schools Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes HB 713**.

Several school systems have allowed therapy dogs (or animals) in school buildings, but in isolated circumstances that are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. For example, after the 2018 school shootings in St. Mary's County, therapy dogs were brought in and served as a useful therapeutic intervention for some students. The law regarding service animals is clear in federal and state law, however, there is no parallel statute to draw from regarding therapy animals, outside of fair housing and national travel advisories. We appreciate the sponsor's good intentions to expand any supportive therapy or environment for children, but the decision to develop a policy and program of this type should be determined by local boards of education and local superintendents.

Therefore, PSSAM **opposes HB 713** and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.

One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students
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